Inspirational Highlights
of the
Bible in America[1]
by Jerry Wiles

Introduction

The purpose of this work is not to be a historical documentary or an academic treatise, but, as the title indicates, to give some inspirational highlights of God's written Word in the life of this remarkable nation, the United States of America.

Our purpose is also to inspire people to become more serious students of history and the Word of God. As you read the accounts of key people, events and developments of the Bible in America and the testimonies of many of our national leaders throughout history, you will become keenly aware of how the hand of God has been on His Word, His people and this nation from its beginning.

While there are many things wrong in America today, the long view of history shows us that God has shown His favor and abundant blessing on the United States of America.. As we recount the work of God through His Word in America, the people and events recorded in these pages will give you an awareness and appreciation of the privileges we enjoy as Americans.

Americans have experienced more freedoms, liberties and opportunities to read, study, preach and share the Word of God than any nation in history. More Bibles have been published in America than in any other nation. More Bibles have been distributed around the world from America than from any other nation. And, more missionaries have been sent out from America than from any other nation.

Many people today emphasize the negative influences of America around the world, and certainly there are those. The more we learn of life in early America, however, the more we will recognize that "righteousness exalts a nation" (see Proverbs 14:34) and the more we will learn of righteousness from God's Word, the Bible.

The intent of this presentation is not to promote the view that America is or ever was a "Christian" nation, that is not the intent. Certainly the country has always been a "religious" country and the predominant religious influence has been Christian, but there have been many non-christian and anti-biblical influences from the very beginning. However, in today's marketplace of ideas and in the school classrooms around the country, very little is taught or understood about the role of the Bible in America.

[1] Dr. Jerry Wiles, Asst. Vice President of Church Relations at Houston Baptist University from 1991 – 2003, oversaw the establishment of the Bible Museum, then called the Bible in America Museum, at HBU from 1997-2003. *Inspirational Highlights of the Bible in America* was published as a booklet in 2002. Since many had requested copies of this now out of print work, it was revised in 2011 for placement on the Dunham Bible Museum website.

Hopefully this material will be food for thought and stimulate an interest in many to dig deeper and do more serious research into these matters.

Even more important than knowing biblical history, understanding how we got the Bible or the spiritual heritage of America, is knowing God through a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Certainly the Bible, God's Word written, is the primary source of anyone coming to know who He is and how to enter into a relationship with Him. The same Holy Spirit, who is the ultimate author through inspiring those who wrote the Bible, is still working in the world today to assist believers in understanding the Scriptures and to draw others to Himself.

Uniqueness of the Bible

The Bible is the most fascinating book ever written. Even though it was written thousands of years ago, it continues to have great relevance in an ever-changing world. It encompasses the whole of history, from the account of creation in Genesis one to the destruction of the world and the creation of the new heaven and new earth in Revelation twenty-one and twenty-two. The Bible answers all of the most important questions we face in life: Where did we come from? Where are we going? Why are we here? In addition, it addresses every problem we face in human experience.

Over a period of more than 1500 years, the Bible was written by more than 40 different writers, on 3 different continents, in 3 different languages. Most of the writers of the Bible never met each other in their lifetimes, yet, there is consistency throughout the Bible--from Genesis to Revelation of the central message and truth that is relevant and vital to all humanity throughout the entire world.

The Bible has had greater impact than anything ever written throughout all of history and has been translated into more languages than any other written document -- portions have been translated into more than 2200 different languages. It remains the most popular and widely read book in the world. John Haynes of Emory University, Candler School of Theology, says:

> The influence of the Bible permeates almost every aspect of life in the twentieth century Western world – laws, literature, art, music, architecture, morals and, of course, religion. Many of the Bible's words and phrases are a part of our current speech, and allusions to its stories are widely understood. It is a vital part of our total cultural heritage; indeed, many people would claim that it is, for a variety of reasons, the most important and influential collection of writings ever brought together and bound in a single volume.[2]

In his book *The Bible in America,* published in 1936, P. Marion Simms had this to say about the influence of the Bible on national life and institutions:

> A material civilization is built on the sand, as history has demonstrated. America has made a marvelous material progress, but if the settlement of America results only in the development of material forces, then it will

[2] John H. Hayes. *Introduction to the Bible*, SPCK, 1973, 3.

> suffer the fate of Babylon, Egypt and Rome. Unless we have some saving element in our civilization, not found among the ancients, then we can have no hope for permanency. But we have something that ancient civilizations did not have—Christianity with its Bible. It is the influence of this book alone that promises us permanency and a glorious future.
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> The Bible has profoundly influenced art, music, sculpture, architecture, literature, and, in fact, every worth-while human interest; but the limits of this volume forbid the discussion of a field so wide. However, it is now proposed to point out something further of the blessings which the Bible, as a chief agency, has brought to the six primary social institutions of our country. They are the family, the church, the school, the state, industry, and the associated life.[3]

Simms' volume covers a wide range of issues related to the Bible in America. For his research he utilized the most prominent University and Theological Libraries in the country as well as the Library of Congress and many books borrowed from Reference and Rare Book Rooms, not ordinarily loaned. After extensive treatment of various aspects of the Bible's influence on the above mentioned areas, i.e. culture, structures of society, etc., he makes this profound statement:

> Christianity is social and would save man's environment, but it rightly begins with the individual; and while it has powerfully influenced the laws, customs and institutions of mankind, its entering wedge has always been personal. Individual victories have accompanied Christianity throughtout its history. However, one man 'born again,' alive with the spirit of Jesus Christ, is enough anywhere to begin the change of the social order. Christianity has often changed the world's worst, conspicuous among such being Augustine of the early church. Norbet of the twelfth century, utterly reckless and dissolute, was changed into an apostolic preacher. John Newton, engaged in the slave trade, and sunk to the lowest depths of degradation, was set on fire with the love of God, to become one of the world's noblest and most useful ministers. We still sing hymns written by him.[4]

The Bible has been the world's best selling book throughout all of history, but it has also had greater opposition than any other book ever written. There have been those who have sought to destroy it, distort it or misuse its message. Yet, God, who inspired the Scriptures, has also preserved them throughout the centuries.

The Bible has proven to be the most accurate and most reliable written document from ancient history. There actually is more evidence supporting the accuracy of the Bible than there is for any other historical document of the early centuries. The interest in the Bible has often changed the course of history. Cultural historian David Hall of Harvard

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[3] P. Marion Simms. *The Bible in America: Versions That Have Played Their Part in the Making of the Republic*. New York: Wilson-Erickson, 1936, 286.
[4] *Bible in America*, 289.

University argues that "the history of spirituality in Europe and America coincides closely with the printing of the Bible and its dissemination."[5]

The Bible's Role in America

The role of the Bible in America has certainly been remarkable. The vast majority of the Puritans, Pilgrims and Founding Fathers had a great interest in the Scriptures, and many were very passionate about propagating its message and incorporating its principles in the life of the new nation.

Although every nation in the world has had its extremists and religious fanatics, America has been blessed overall with many godly leaders throughout its history. It is amazing to discover how many of America's Founding Fathers were faithful church members and involved in the Bible movement. Many had leadership roles in establishing and guiding numerous religious societies or through serving in active ministry. Here are just a few of the many examples from historical records:

- Joseph Bloomfield (Governor of New Jersey): Member of the New Jersey Bible Society.
- James Bowdoin (Governor of Massachusetts): Member of the Society for Propagating the Gospel Among the Indians and Others.
- James Brown (U. S. Senator; Diplomat): Original Officer of the American Bible Society.
- James Burrill, Jr. (Chief Justice of Rhode Island Supreme Court; U. S. Senator): President of the Providence Auxiliary Bible Society.
- Dewitt Clinton (Governor of New York; U. S. Senator): Manager and Vice-President of the American Bible Society.
- John Davenport (Revolutionary Officer; U. S. Congress): Member of the Missionary Society of Connecticut.
- Francis Scott Key (Attorney; Author of "The Star-Spangled Banner"): Manager and Vice-President of the American Sunday School Union.
- Andrew Kirkpatrick (Chief Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court): Vice-President of the New Jersey Bible Society; Vice-President of the American Bible Society.
- Vice-President of the New Jersey Bible Society; Vice-President of the American Bible Society.
- Marquis de La Fayette (Revolutionary General): Member of the American Sunday School Union.
- George Madison (Governor of Kentucky): Original Officer of the American Bible Society.
- John Marshall (Chief Justice of the U. S. Supreme Court; Secretary of State; Revolutionary General): Vice-President of the American Bible Society; officer in the American Sunday School Union.

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- John Cotton Smith (Governor of Connecticut; U. S. Congressman): first President of the Connecticut Bible Society; President of the American Bible Society; President of the American Board of Foreign Missions.

There are many other historical records that demonstrate the interest and commitment that our Founders and national leaders have had in the Bible and its place in American government, education and various aspects of our national culture.

Two historians at the University of Houston did a ten-year study of the ideas that shaped America. They studied 15,000 documents from the Colonial era, which were narrowed down to 3,154 statements. They found that the three most quoted individuals were French philosopher Montesquieu (8.3 percent), English jurist Sir William Blackstone (7.9 percent) and English philosopher John Locke (2.9 percent). Thirty-four percent of quotes in public documents came directly from the Bible.[6]

The following quotes reflect some of the strong feelings and beliefs that many of our Founding Fathers and national leaders have expressed about the Bible:

George Washington said, "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible."[7]

Patrick Henry said, "The Bible is a book worth more than all the other books that were ever printed."[8]

Noah Webster said, "The moral principles and precepts contained in the Scriptures ought to form the basis of all our civil constitutions and law… All the miseries and evils which men suffer from vice, crime, ambition, injustice, oppression, slavery, and war, proceed from their despising or neglecting the precepts contained in the Bible."[9]

William Holmes McGuffey, publisher of the McGuffey Readers, a vital cornerstone of this nation's education system, said, "From no source has the author drawn more copiously than from the Sacred Scriptures. For this I certainly apprehend no censure. In a Christian country, that man is to be pitied, who, at this day, can honestly object to imbuing the minds of youth with the language and spirit of the Word of God."[10]

Abraham Lincoln said, "In regard to this Great Book, I have but to say, I believe the Bible is the best gift God has given to man. All the good the Saviour gave to the world was communicated through this Book. But for this Book we could not know right from

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[6] Donald Lutz & Charles Hyneman. *American Political Writing During the Founding Era, 1760-1805*. Liberty Press, 1983.
[7] Henry H. Halley. *Halley's Bible Handbook* . Grand Rapids, MI: Regency Reference Library, 1962, 18.
[8] William Wirt. *The Life and Character of Patrick Henry*. Philadelphia: James Webster, 1818, 402.
[9] Noah Webster. *History of the United States*. 1832, 339.
[10] William Holmes McGuffey. *McGuffey Eclectic Third Reader* (Cincinnati: Winthrop B. Smith & Co., 1848), 5.

wrong. All things most desireable for man's welfare, here and hereafter, are to be found portrayed in it."[11]

Theodore Roosevelt, twenty-sixth U. S. president said, "If we read the Bible aright, we read a book which teaches us to go forth and do the work of the Lord, to do the work of the Lord in the world as we find it; to try to make things better in this world, even if only a little better because we have lived in it…we plead for a closer and wider and deeper study of the Bible, so that our people may be in fact as well as in theory, 'doers of the Word and not hearers only.'"[12]

Herbert Hoover, thirty-first president of the United States said, "The whole inspiration of our civilization springs from the teachings of Christ and the lessons of the prophets. To read the Bible for these fundamentals is a necessity of American life."[13]

Former Chief Justice Earl Warren, addressing the annual prayer breakfast of the International Council of Christian Leadership in 1954 said, "I believe no one can read the history of our country without realizing that the Good Book and the spirit of the Savior have from the beginning been our guiding geniuses…. Whether we look to the first charter of Virginia…or to the Charter of New England…or to the Charter of Massachusetts Bay…or to the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut…the some objective is present: A Christian land governed by Christian principles….I believe the entire Bill of Rights came into being because of the knowledge our forefathers had of the Bible and their belief in it; freedom of belief, of expression, of assembly, of petition, the dignity of the individual, the sanctity of the home, equal justice under law, and the reservation of powers to the people….I like to believe we are living today in the spirit of the Christian religion. I like also to believe that as long as we do so, no great harm can come to our country."[14]

One of the most amazing things about the Bible is the discovery of how little most people know about it at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Even in America, with all the various translations and versions that are available, most people have never read the entire Bible even once. However, reading through the whole Bible was a fairly common practice in the early part of our nation's history. In order to have a well-rounded education in America today, it's important to know something of how we got the Bible, the history and influence of the Bible in America, and most of all, the content of the Bible itself. We can get to know its content by reading it for ourselves. Spending only fifteen minutes a day we can read through the entire Bible in one year.

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[11] Roy P. Basler, ed. *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, 9 vols.* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 1:382.
[12] Frank Glenn Lankard. *Bible and Life and Ideals of English-speaking People*, American Bible Society, 7.
[13] Charles E. Jones. *The Books You Read*. Harrisburg, PA: Executive Books, 1985). 116.
[14] "Religion: Breakfast in Washington," *Time*, February 15, 1954, available at http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,936197,00.html.

The earliest English Bibles

The story of the Bible in America would not be complete without recognizing the price that was paid, the labor and sacrifice of so many over the centuries. Consider just a few of those the Lord has used to make it possible to have the Bible available in the form we have it today.

The person who was first responsible for the Bible being translated into English was John Wycliffe, an Oxford scholar. This hand-written manuscript Bible was produced in the 1380's, more than 70 years before the printing press was invented. Wycliffe and those who worked with him produced the first English Bible translated from the Latin Vulgate. His teachings so infuriated the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church that, 44 years after Wycliffe's death, Wycliffe ws officially declared a heretic and his bones were dug up, burned, and scattered in the river.

Yet, the work of John Wycliffe made a major impact on the reform of England. His passion was to make the Word of God available to the common people. He is referred to as "the Morningstar of the Reformation."

It was in the 1450's that Johann Gutenberg invented the movable metal-type printing press. The first book Gutenberg printed was the Latin Vulgate Bible. The printing press greatly increased the availability of the Bible and religious texts throughout Europe, aiding the Reformation.

In 1516 Desiderius Erasmus produced his Greek/Latin Parallel New Testament. The Latin was not the Vulgate translation of Jerome, but a new translation taken from the Greek New Testament text that Erasmus had collated from six or seven partial New Testament manuscripts into a complete Greek New Testament. Erasmus' work would become a very valuable tool to both Martin Luther, in translating the Bible into German and to William Tyndale, in translating it into English. The Latin that Erasmus translated from the Greek exposed the corruptions that had crept into the Latin Bible over the previous thousand years.

Martin Luther's German translation was completed in 1522. Then in 1525/6, William Tyndale's New Testament was printed--which was the first New Testament to be printed in the English language and the first to be translated from the Greek

Since having any portion of the Bible in English had been illegal after Wycliffe had made his translation, William Tyndale had fled to the Continent to pursue his translation work. He did most of his work as a fugitive in refugee camps around Europe. Tyndale could read, write and speak in at least seven languages and it is said that one could not tell which was his mother tongue. He is considered by many to be the primary architect of today's English language.

William Tyndale was hunted down for his translation work, Turned over to the authorities by a false friend, he was tried and convicted of heresy. In 1536, Tyndale was

strangled and burned at the stake. His dying words were, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes."

Myles Coverdale and John Rogers were loyal coworkers with William Tyndale the last six years of his life. They continued and even accelerated the translation work. Coverdale finished translating the Old Testament into English from the Latin and German (he knew no Hebrew), and in 1535 he printed the first complete Bible in the English language. John Rogers went on to print the second complete English Bible in 1537, using the pseudonym of Thomas Matthews. Commonly known as the "Matthews Bible." "Matthews Bible" included Tyndale's New Testament and the translation Tyndale had done on portions of the Old Testament; Rogers translated the remainder of the Old Testament, again from the Latin and German. Within a year of Tyndale's death, Henry VIII allowed both of these Bibles to circulate in England – an answer to Tyndale's dying prayer.

In 1539, Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canturbury, hired Myles Coverdale at the bequest of King Henry VIII to publish a Bible to be used in the churches. The Bible became known as the "Great Bible" because of its large size. The Great Bible was the first English Bible authorized for public use and was distributed to every church in England. It was chained to the pulpits and a reader was provided so that the illiterate could hear the Word of God in plain English.

When Queen Mary (a.k.a. "Bloody Mary") came to power, she opposed the printing of the Bible in English. Many English Protestants fled to Switzerland for safety. In 1560, a group of scholars in exile published what became known as the Geneva Bible. The Geneva Bible was the first English Bible translated completely from both the Hebrew and the Greek, the first to have verse divisions, and the first to use roman letters, rather than Gothic font. Because of its extensive marginal notes and references, it is considered to be the first English "Study Bible." Due to a passage in Genesis describing the clothing that God fashioned for Adam and Eve upon expulsion from the Garden of Eden as "Breeches" (an antiquated form of "Britches"), some people referred to the Geneva Bible and the Breeches Bible.

William Shakespeare quotes thousands of times in his plays from the Geneva translation of the Bible. The Geneva Bible was the Bible used by John Milton, John Bunyan and Oliver Cromwell. It became the Bible of choice of English speaking Christians for over 100 years. Between 1560 and 1644, at least 144 editions of the Geneva Bible were published. Examination of the 1611 King James Bible shows clearly that its translators were influenced much more by the Geneva Bible than by any other source. The Geneva Bible itself retains over 90% of William Tyndale's original English translation. The Geneva, in fact, remained more popular than the King James Version until decades after its original release in 1611.

Earliest Bibles in America

The Geneva Bible was the Bible of the early Jamestown settlers and of the Puritans and Pilgrims. However, the first Bible brought to America was probably a Latin Vulgate

Bible brought by Christopher Columbus. Columbus had read the Bible extensively, and even compiled a list of Scriptures and other quotes about the spread of Christianity throughout the world which he called his *Book of Prophecies*. Columbus explained how the Bible influenced his thinking and motives for exploration:

> It was the Lord who put into my mind (I could feel his hand upon me) the fact that it would be possible to sail from here to the Indies. All who heard of my project rejected it with laughter, ridiculing me.
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> There is no question that the inspiration was from the Holy Spirit, because He comforted me with rays of marvelous inspiration from the Holy Scriptures….
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> I said that I would state my reasons: I hold alone to the sacred and Holy Scriptures, and to the interpretations of prophecy given by certain devout persons…
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> I am a most unworthy sinner, but I have cried out to the Lord for grace and mercy, and they have covered me completely. I have found the sweetest consolation since I made it my whose purpose to enjoy His marvelous presence. For the execution of the journey to the Indies, I did not make use of intelligence, mathematics or maps. It is simply the fulfillment of what Isaiah had prophesied….
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> No one should fear to undertake any task in the name of our Saviour, if it is just and if the intention is purely for His holy service. The working out of all things has been assigned to each person by the Lord, but it all happens according to His sovereign will even though he gives advice. He lacks nothing that it is in the power of men to give Him. Oh, what a gracious Lord, who desires that people should perform for Him those things which He holds Himself responsible! Day and night, moment by moment, everyone should express the most devoted gratitude to Him.[15]

The extent to which American history has been shaped by the influence of the Bible, and the vital role it had in the settling of America is amazing. One of the most inspiring benefits in the study of history is to discover how seeds sown hundreds or even thousands of years ago can impact our lives today. Of course, Jesus used the analogy of seed when teaching about the power of the Word of God as recorded in the Gospels. Dr. Elizabeth Youmans, editor of *The Noah Plan* with the Foundation for American Christian Education, shares this story in her article entitled "The First Thanksgiving: The Pilgrim Seed of Our Christian Republic":

> Governor Bradford's literary masterpiece, *Of Plimoth Plantation*, is as heroic and inspirational a story as any epic in history. Rich with examples

[15] Kay Brigham. *Christopher Columbus: his life and discovery in the light of his prophecies,* Barcelona, Spain: M.C.E Horeb, 82-85.

of bold adventure, sterling character, and daring enterprise, it established an eternal testimony of God's continual providence, through the mundane and the miraculous! *Of Plimoth Plantation* reads like an extension of the Book of Acts, both in content and literary beauty. This first American classic echoes the words, phrases, and rhythm of the Geneva Bible, 'his book of all learning.' Bradford, a 'man made by the Bible' from the tender age of twelve, was steeped in the 1560 scholarly translation with its marginal notes that set forth the political influence of Presbyterian Reformists. For thirty-five years this Yorkshire farmer governed Plymouth as a shepherd-guardian and, like Luke, became its scribe. Without formal education, his account exemplifies the fruit of self-education, the fruit of a mind and heart schooled in Biblical reasoning.

The Pilgrim Story is the event in America's history that most dramatically links our founding to God's purpose in Christ, His Story. From the first century through the English Reformation, God providentially prepared a self-governing people and preserved the land that would receive them. God's silent Hand directed the movement of the Gospel westward to Britain in the first century, and as it was preached in the Celtic language, converts established decentralized New Testament churches. Celtic pastor Patrick and his disciples evangelized the British Isles in the fifth century. He wrote the Book of the Law of Moses which inspired local chieftains to apply the rule of God's law to local self-government. These seeds were to birth a love of liberty rooted in the Gospel in the tapestry of English character. Woven from ninth-century Christian king, Alfred the Great, through the writing of the Magna Charta, to the translation of the Bible into English through martyrs Wycliffe and Tyndale, liberty for the individual continued to wax brighter. With Cabot's 1497 claim to North America for England and the establishment of the Protestant church during Henry VIII's reign, God's divine timing of events redirected the course of history. Personal reformation 'without tarring for any,' kindled by the holy flame of Scripture in the hands of individuals, forged the liberty of conscience found in the Pilgrim Dynamic.

First Printings of the Bible in America

John Eliot, who came to America from England in 1631, played an important role in the educational beginnings of the New World. The first complete Bible printed in America was the "Eliot Indian Bible" of 1663. (The New Testament was printed two years earlier in 1661.) Eliot had been educated at Cambridge and was the pastor of a church in Roxbury, Massachusetts. He had an outreach to the Algonquin Indians, who had no written language at that time. Eliot was instrumental in developing a written language, translating the Scriptures and printing the first Bible in America. Known as "The Apostle to the Indians," Eliot was also responsible for writing the first Indian grammar book in America.

In 1633, John Eliot suggested the need for and proposed the establishment of an institution of higher education in the Massachusetts Bay area. That resulted in the founding of Harvard University (then College) three years later, in 1636. John Eliot, along with Richard Mather, (the father of Increase Mather and grandfather of Cotton Mather), and with the help of Thomas Welch, was responsible for the first book printed in America -- the *Bay Psalm Book*, printed in 1640. John Eliot's amazing contributions--the first college, the first book and the first Bible in America have certainly impacted the nation in a positive way.

The "Christoph Saur Bible" of 1743 is the first Bible printed in America in a European language -- German. It was reprinted in 1763 and 1776. Christoph Saur had a son by the same name who was also a Bible printer.

The Francis Bailey New Testament, 1780, was published during the Revolutionary War and is an example of the earliest Scriptures printed in English in America. The edition in the Dunham Bible Museum is the only known complete existing copy.

The Bible in America: Founding of a New Nation

Two key figures in the Bible publishing industry prior to the beginning of the Bible society movement were the colonial printer, Robert Aitken, and the premier book publisher of the early republic, Mathew Carey.

The Aitken Bible of 1782 is said to be the first entire English Bible printed in America. Known as the "Bible of the Revolution," this Bible was authorized by a resolution issued by the Continental Congress. The copy in the Dunham Bible Museum at Houston Baptist University is an original first edition. Although Aitken printed 10,000 copies of the Bible, only about forty existing copies are known today. There are actually fewer Aitken Bibles existing today than Gutenberg Bibles. The translation is the King James Version of 1611, the translation which remained the pre-eminent translation for Americans well into the closing years of the 20th century.

Robert Aitken came to Philadelphia from his native land of Scotland. He was publisher of *The Pennsylvania Magazine* and the printer for the Continental Congress. Aitken had printed New Testaments in English in 1777, '78, '79 and '81 before printing this complete Bible in 1782.

According to John Stevens Kerr, "Though the Pilgrims brought the Geneva Bible with them from England, by the time printing got started in the colonies, the KJV was in popular circulation. However, publishing of the KJV was restricted to the King's printers in England."[16] William Bradford proposed an American edition of the Bible in 1688, but the idea was never acted on. Cotton Mather, as a result of his concern over printers' errors, worked for fifteen years on his own American edition of the Bible but could not find a publisher in America or England who would take on the project. Mather's manuscript is still preserved today in the Massachusetts Historical Society.

[16] John Stevens Kerr. *Ancient Texts Alive Today: The Story of the English Bible*. New York: American Bible Society, 1999, 131.

A printer in Boston by the name of John Fleming sought three hundred subscribers to underwrite what he proposed to be "as correct and beautiful an Edition of the Sacred Writings" as any in the world. He failed to get enough subscribers to move ahead with his endeavor.

However, Isaiah Thomas, in his book *The History of Printing in America* says that actually Bibles were printed in America as early as the 1750's on illegal presses smuggled into the country from England. Thomas writes that when he was an apprentice, he often heard those who had assisted at the case and press in printing the Kneeland and Green Bible, make mention of the fact. He says that the booksellers of this time were enterprising. It was the partnership of Kneeland and Green that issued this first Bible and only about seven or eight hundred copies were printed, according to Isaiah Thomas. The printing and distribution of this Bible was carried out as privately as possible, for obvious reasons, "and had the London imprint of the copy from which it was reprinted, viz: 'London: Printed by Mark Baskett, Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majesty,' in order to prevent a prosecution from those in England and Scotland, who published the Bible by a patent from the crown; or, Cum privilegio, as did the English universities of Oxford and Cambridge."[17]

Prior to the Revolutionary War, the King of England did not allow English Bibles to be printed outside the United Kingdom. So English Bibles were imported to America, primarily from England and Holland.

In addition to being a Bible printer, Robert Aitken was an ardent proponent of the cause of liberty, and as result, he narrowly escaped arrest and detention in the British prison hulk then anchored in New York harbor.

Aitken had gained the reputation of being a strong patriot and when the Congress met in Philadelphia to organize the resistance of the Thirteen Colonies to form a new Nation, it turned to Robert Aitken to publish the *Journals of Congress.*

Concern over the approach of the British caused the Congress to flee from Philadelphia to Baltimore and in December, 1776, they issued this resolution:

> Resolved that the Committee appointed to superintend the printing of the journals of Congress be empowered and directed to send an Express to enquire where Mr. Robert Aitken, who was employed in printing them, is or may be; and that they cause so much of them as are already printed to be removed to this place and also to remove his press and utensils to this place at public expense, provided that said Robert Aitken shall be willing to come with them and perform his engagement with Congress.[18]

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[17] Isaiah Thomas. *The History of Printing in America with a Biography of Printers and an Account of Newspapers.* Worcester, MA, 1810, 365.

[18] *Journals of the Continental Congress*, 1774-1789, vol. 6. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1906, December 21, 1776, 1030.

As the official printer of the Continental Congress, Aitken was very familiar with the members and the problems they were facing. The scarcity of Bibles in the Colonies was a major concern to them.

Before the Revolutionary War, the Colonies had depended mainly on importing English Bibles and other printed materials from England. The War stopped importation and the situation reached a point that the Chaplian of the Congress, the Rev. Patrick Allison, D.D., submitted a petition praying for help. The matter was given great attention by a special committee and in September, 1777, it reported:

> The Committee to whom the Memorial of Doctor Allison and others was referred, report, that they have conferred fully with the printers, etc, in this city, and are of the opinion that the proper types for printing the Bible are not to be had in this country, and that the paper cannot be procured, but with such difficulties and subject to such casualties as to render any dependence on it altogether improper; that to import types for purpose of setting up an entire edition of the Bible, and to strike off 30,000 copies, with paper, binding, etc., will cost L~10,272:10s., which must be advanced by Congress to be reimbursed by the sale of the books: that in the opinion of the Committee considerable difficulties will attend the procuring the types and paper, that afterwards the risque of importing them will considerably enhance the cost, and that the calculations are subject to such uncertainly on the present state of affairs, that Congress cannot rely on them: that the use of the Bible is so universal and its importance so great, that your Committee refer the above to the consideration of congress, and if congress shall not think it expedient to order importation of types and paper, the Committee recommend that Congress will order the Committee of Congress to import 20,000 Bibles from Holland, Scotland, or elsewhere, in the different parts of the States of the Union.[19]

Whereupon it was resolved accordingly to direct said Committee to import 20,000 copies of the Bible.

When the vote was taken, the resolution was passed by only one vote. Prior to the adoption of the Constitution of the United States, votes were cast by States rather than by individual members of the Congress. Because of the close margin of the vote, the matter was put over "until Saturday next" - nothing more was ever heard of it.

During the fall of 1780, the demand for Bibles and the difficulty of procuring them was again brought before the Congress. On October 26th, the following motion was introduced by James McLene and was seconded by John Hanson, respecting the printing of the Old and New Testaments:

> Resolved that it be recommended to such of the States who may think it convenient for them that they take proper measures to procure one or more new and correct editions of the Old and New Testament to be

[19] *The American Congress: From 1774 to 1788*. Washington: Way and Gideon, 1823, 261-262.

> printed and that such states regulate their printers by law so as to secure effectually the said books from being misprinted.[20]

Its been said that Revolutionary America without Bibles presented an impossible situation. In no country in the world was the Bible then so important and relied upon. Faith in Divine Providence and the consolation and guidance of the Scriptures was necessary to all patriots in the struggle of Liberty.

Robert Aitken recognized the plight of the new Nation without the Bible in the English language. The early editions of Aitken's New Testaments, printed between 1777 and 1781, were well received, but he had a desire to produce an entire English Bible.

Aitken's place of business on Market Street in Philadelphia was near the Coffee House where patriots from the Thirteen States often gathered and knowing many of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence personally, there he would talk of his desire to print the entire Bible in English.

In January of 1781, Robert Aitken presented a petition to Congress announcing his determination to print an entire Bible in English. The petition was referred to a committee of which the Rev. John Witherspoon and Thomas McKean, both Signers of the Declaration of Independence, were members. Aitken not only asked for the Congress' approval, but also requested support for the project. When Congress passed a resolution supporting Aitken's printing of the Bible, Aitken printed the resolution at the front of his Bible (see Appendix).

A dominant force in American publishing and the largest producer of Bibles in the early part of the 1800's in the North American Colonies, Mathew Carey was the first in America to publish the Douay Bible, a Catholic translation, and went on to publish numerous editions of the King James Version as well. He became an innovator in Bible publication, marketing, and distribution. Born in Dublin, Carey fled to Paris because of political persecution. There he was befriended by Benjamin Franklin, who was serving as a diplomat in France at the time. After returning to his home in Ireland and suffering further persecution, Carey fled to America dressed like a woman. He landed in Philadelphia in 1784, where the Marquis de La Fayette soon took an interest in Carey. After hearing of his plans and hopes for the future, La Fayette assisted him in getting his start in business. From very small beginnings, Matthew Carey built his fortune as a journalist, printer and bookseller. His firm became one of the largest Bible selling and printing firms and the largest and most important printing house in the country. He was the first president of the American Company of Bible Sellers, organized in 1801 in New York. He died in 1839, leaving his business to his son, who carried it on under the name of Carey and Lea.

[20] *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789.* Washington: Government Printing Office, 1910, Volume 18, 979.

After the Revolutionary War

Another prominent figure in the Bible industry in America at the time was Isaiah Thomas. Thomas was a well-known printer of Bibles during the Second Great Awakening. He identified with a political faction who wanted to change the name of the country to the United States of Columbia, even after the country became known as the United States of America, so he continued to print Bibles even into the 1800s and included on the title page that they were printed in the "United States of Columbia."

Thomas was an enterprising Bible printer who devised an unusual scheme of financing and marketing his Bibles. He set the price of his Bibles and allowed purchasers to pay half in advance of printing. For advance payment he accepted rye, wheat, corn, butter or pork delivered to his stores in Boston or Worcester. The remaining balance was to be paid in cash upon delivery of the printed Bible. He was very successful and for his many accomplishments received several honorary degrees and a letter of commendation from George Washington.

Isaiah Thomas became the founder of the American Antiquarian Society and wrote a book entitled *The History of Printing in America.* Thomas had a son-in-law named Anson Whipple who was also a printer of Bibles.

The Thomson Bible of 1808 was a very important American Bible. Charles Thomson made the first translation of the (Greek) Septuagint into the English language. He has the distinction of producing the first translation of the Bible into English in America. The Thomson Bible is also the first Bible printed in America by a woman, Jane Aitken (the daughter of Robert Aitken).

Born in Ireland, Thomson came to America when he was eleven years old. His father died aboard the ship on the way to America, leaving his son to land alone and in poverty in New Castle, Delaware. A family there took young Charles in with the idea of making him a blacksmith. Not being keen on smithery, and evidently having other ambitions, he ran away. On the road a kindhearted woman offered him a ride in her carriage and, being inquisitive, she asked Charles what he wanted to be. Charles replied, "A scholar." She was so impressed that she cared for him and provided for his education. He received the Master's degree from the College of Pennsylvania, which later became the University of Pennsylvania.

Charles Thomson was elected the Secretary of the Continental Congress when it was organized in 1774 and served in that position until he retired in 1789. He retired so that he could devote himself to his scholarly interests of Bible study and translation. He spent more than twenty years translating the Bible into English from the Greek Septuagint.

A significant motivation for Thomson's work in translating the Bible was attacking the religious skepticism of the time by producing a version of the Scriptures to answer the concerns about the authenticity of Jesus' teachings and the Bible's credibility. These concerns over biblical credibility and authenticity led him to choose the Septuagint, which dates back to the third century B. C. when Jewish scholars worked together to

translate the Hebrew Scriptures in Greek (The SXeptuagint is the earliest record of a book being translated into another language.).

Thomson had observed that when the New Testament writers quoted from the Old Testament, they almost always used the Septuagint. He discovered that no English translation had ever been done from the Septuagint. Thomson had the conviction that an accurate translation from this Greek version would vindicate the authority and genuineness of the Bible and its teachings. He also wanted to determine if Jesus actually fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies relating to His messianic claims.

In his well-researched and documented book *An American Bible, A History of the Good Book in the United, 1777-1880,* Paul C. Gutjahr points out that

> Thomson's achievement is remarkable for its depth of scholarship and its anticipation of two concerns that would mark American biblical translation for the next seventy years. First, Thomson was interested in the *first texts.* To strengthen further his argument concerning the Bible's reliability and authenticity. Thomson made it clear that not only had the New Testament writers used the Septuagint in their references to Old Testament law and prophecy, but also that the Septuagint offered an older version of the Old Testament than many of the Hebrew signatures used to translate various English versions of the Bible. Because of the Septuagint's age, Thomson argued that its closer proximity to biblical events made it less subject to historical errors and allowed it to claim primacy as the least corrupt text from which to make a translation."
>
> Second, Thomson was interested in *first meanings*. He was firmly convinced that he needed more than a translation of the oldest available texts to accomplish a sound revision of the Bible. He also sought the historical meanings of biblical words and phrases. He characterized his translation as an endeavor 'to give a just and true representation of the sense and meaning of the Sacred Scriptures; and in doing this, I have further endeavored to convey into the translation, as far as I could, the spirit and manner of the authors, and thereby give it the quality of an original.' In capturing this 'spirit and manner,' he hoped to render more clearly the original meaning of the authors and avoid making the meaning of the Holy Scriptures 'obscure' or their translation 'harsh.'[21]

At the age of fifty three, Charles Thomson had served eight years as Secretary of the Continental Congress, where he had acquired a reputation for fairness, truth and integrity. Although not a well known founder, Thomson was very influential and instrumental in the beginnings of the United States. Incidentally, Charles Thomson was given the task of creating the final design for the Great Seal of the United States in June, 1782.

[21] Paul Gutjahr. *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777-1880.* Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999, 94.

The John Brown Self Interpreting Bible of 1792 was the earliest version of the Bible printed in New York. A subscription Bible, it was printed in 40 parts over two years. This Bible contains marginal references, explanatory notes and evangelical reflections by the late Reverend John Brown, a Scottish weaver who became a Presbyterian Minister. Many Bibles produced during this time period were subscriber Bibles. They were sold in advance, or partial payment was made, and the names of all those purchasing that edition were listed in the front of the Bible. The first name listed in this Bible is George Washington. Other prominent Americans who are listed as subscribers include John Jay, Frances Bailey and Isaiah Thomas.

The Bible Society Movement in America

The very first Bible Society was formed in Halle, Germany, in 1710 as an outgrowth of the missionary movement of the Moravians. Bible Societies as a worldwide movement began during the Second Great Awakening with the establishment of the British and Foreign Bible Society 1804. The first Bible Society established in America was the Philadelphia Bible Society in 1808. The second was the New York Bible Society, founded in 1809. It later changed its name to the International Bible Society and is now located in Colorado Springs. [22]

Bible societies played a very important role in the advancement of the gospel around the world. In the early nineteenth century Bible societies were organized in most of Europe and in various locations in North America. Bible societies made the Scriptures available and more affordable than ever before. In addition to adding momentum to the worldwide mission movement, the societies became increasingly involved in translating Scriptures into the languages of places where pioneer mission work was taking place. Bible societies today produce nearly thirty million Bibles, New Testaments and Scripture portions every year.

Following the founding of Bible societies in Philadelphia, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, and Maine, the American Bible Society was established in 1816. The first president the American Bible Society was Elias Boudinot. While Elias Boudinot is not a well-known name today, he was a very prominent individual during his lifetime. He served three terms in the Continental Congress from New Jersey and was the President of the Continental Congress in 1782 when the first English Bible was printed in America.

At the age of 75, the long officially- retired Elias Boudinot – baptized by George Whitefield, onetime neighbor of Benjamin Franklin, fellow patriot of George Washington and mentor of Alexander Hamilton – accepted the position of president of the American Bible Society. Though Boudinot had served in important positions during the American Revolution and founding of the United States, he considered the presidency of the American Bible Society as "the greatest honor that could have been conferred on me this side of the grave."[23]

[22] *Ancient Texts Alive Today*, 198.
[23] *American Bible*, 9.

Boudinot was fearful that he might see America collapse in his lifetime. He had a deep concern that the country was drifting away from its biblical roots. In response to Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason,* Boudinot wrote a book entitled *The Age of Revelation.* When the book was not a great success, he turned his attention and energy toward the production and distribution of the Bible. He believed the mass distribution of the Scriptures would stem the tide of infidelity in the nation. One of the early goals of the American Bible Society was to place a Bible in every home in America.

Dr. Paul Gutjahr puts it this way, "Serving as the ideological cornerstone to Boudinot's plan for national redemption was the notion that simply exposing Americans to biblical truth would lead to their spiritual, and thus moral, regeneration. The presumably clear and truthful teachings of the Bible would prevail. At the root of this notion stood the belief that truth was both self-evident and virtually self-enforcing."[24]

Boudinot held the conviction that the Scriptures spoke for themselves and the Society adopted the policy of producing Bibles without note or commentary, a policy still maintained by the American Bible Society today.

John Quincy Adams, sixth president of the United States, was Chairman of the American Bible Society in 1844, at the age of 77, while serving as a U. S. Congressman. In addressing that organization, he said, "I deem myself fortunate in having the opportunity, at a stage of a long life drawing rapidly to its close, to bear at this place, the capital of our National Union, in the Hall of representatives of the North American people, in the chair of the presiding officer of the assembly representing the whole people, the personification of the great and mighty nation – to bear my solemn testimonial of reverence and gratitude to that book of books, the Holy Bible…. The Bible carries with it the history of the creation, the fall and redemption of man, and discloses to him, in the infant born at Bethlehem, the Legislator and Saviour of the world."[25]

In a letter to his son in 1811, John Quincy Adams wrote, "I have myself for many years, made it a practice to read through the Bible every year… It is essential, my son, in order that you may go through life with comfort to yourself, and usefulness to your fellow creatures, that you should form and adopt certain rules or principles, for the government of your own conduct and temper….It is in the Bible, you must learn them, and from the Bible how to practice them. Those duties are to God, to your fellow-creatures, and to yourself." He continues, "Let us, then, search the Scriptures…. The Bible contains the revelation of the will of God. It contains the history of the creation of the world, and of mankind; and afterward the history of one peculiar nation, certainly the most extraordinary nation that has ever appeared upon the earth. It contains a system of religion, and of morality, which we may examine upon its own merits, independent of the sanction it receives from being the Word of God…I shall number separately those letters that I mean to write you upon the subject of the Bible…. I wish that hereafter they may be useful to your brothers and sisters, as well as to you. As you will receive them as a

[24] *American Bible*, 45.
[25] Samuel Hanson. *Interviews: Memorable and useful from Diary and Memory Reproduced.* New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1853, 270-273.

token of affection for you, during my absence… From your affectionate Father, John Quincy Adams."[26]

Well-known American statesman John Jay was the second president of the American Bible Society. Jay served in the Continental Congress, served as Secretary of Foreign Affairs under the Articles of Confederation and also as U. S. Minister to Spain. In 1794, he authored the Jay Treaty, which prevented the United States from becoming involved in the war between France and England. He was one of the authors of the *Federalist Papers* in support of the Constitution, and was the first Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court under that Constitution.

The Bible and American Education

The person credited with founding the first Bible society in America was Dr. Benjamin Rush. Dr. Rush was an outspoken Christian, a prominent statesman and is also known as the father of American medicine. He founded five colleges and universities, including the first college for women in America. Among his many accomplishments, Benjamin Rush was a prolific author, writing the first American Chemistry textbook and was appointed by President John Adams as Treasurer of the U. S. Mint. At the time of his death in 1813, he was heralded as one of the three most notable figures of America, the other two being George Washington and Benjamin Franklin.

One of Benjamin Rush's many writings was an essay entitled, "A Defense of the use of the Bible in Schools." In that work he says,

> Now the Bible contains more truth than any other book in the world; so true is the testimony that it bears of God in His works of creation, providence, and redemption that it is called truth itself, by way of preeminence above other things that are acknowledged to be true. How forcibly are we struck with the evidence of truth in the history of the Jews, above what we discover in the history of other nations. Where do we find a hero of an historian record his own faults and vices except in the Old Testament? In deed, my friend, from some accounts which I have read of the American Revolution, I begin to grow skeptical to all history except that which is contained in the Bible. Now, if this book be known to contain nothing but what is materially true, the mind will naturally acquire a love for it from this circumstance; and from this affection for the truths of the Bible, it will acquire a discernment of truth in other books, and a preference of it in all the transactions of life.
>
> There is wonderful property in the memory which enables it in old age to recover the knowledge acquired in early life after it had been apparently forgotten for forty or fifty years. Of how much consequence, then, must it be to fill the mind with that species of knowledge in childhood and youth which, when recalled in the decline of life, will support the soul under the infirmities of age and smooth the avenues of approaching death. The

[26] John Quincy Adams. *Letters of John Quincy Adams to His Son, On the Bible and Its Teachings*. Auburn, NY: Derby, Miller, & Co. 1848,11. 20-21.

> Bible is the only book which is capable of affording this support to old age; and it is for this reason that we find it resorted to with so much diligence and pleasure by such old people as have read it in early life. I can recollect many instances of this kind in persons who discovered no special attachment to the Bible in the meridian of their days, who have, notwithstanding, spent the evening of life in reading no other book. The late Sir John Pringle, physician to the queen of Great Britain, after passing a long life in camps and at court, closed it by studying the Scriptures. So anxious was he to increase his knowledge in them that he wrote to Dr. Michaelis, a learned professor of divinity in Germany, for an explanation of a difficult text of Scripture a short time before his death.

In the same essay Dr. Rush says,

> We err, not only in human affairs but in religion likewise, only because we do not 'know the Scriptures' and obey their instructions. Immense truths, I believe, are concealed in them. The time, I have no doubt, will come when posterity will view and pity our ignorance of these truths as much as we do the ignorance sometimes manifested by the disciples of our Saviour, who know nothing of the meaning of those plain passages in the Old Testament which were daily fulfilling before their eyes.[27]

In 1791 Rush warned that if the Bible was ever taken out of American schools, there would be an explosion of crime in America. He said that our money would all go toward fighting crime because the only thing that could prevent crime (the Bible) was removed.

It was also in 1791 that the first Family Bible was printed in America. The preface to the Bible, explaining the history of the Bible's translation and the importance of reading the Scriptures, was written by Rev. John Witherspoon. Witherspoon was the sixth president of Princeton, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and from 1776 to 1782 a leading member of the Continental Congress. He came from Scotland in 1768 to assume the presidency of Princeton and served in there until his death twenty five years later.

Witherspoon was a graduate of the University of Edinburgh and received an honorary doctorate from St. Andrews in 1764. He had become widely known as a leader of the evangelical or "Popular Party" in the Church of Scotland. Benjamin Rush, who was a medical student at Edinburgh, was instrumental in Witherspoon becoming president of Princeton. He was the only ordained minister among the Signers of the Declaration of Independence.

John Witherspoon has been called "the man who shaped the men who shaped America." His greatest accomplishments include mentoring a U. S. president, vice president, seventy seven members of Congress and three Supreme Court Justices.

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[27] Benjamin Rush. *The Bible in Schools*. American Tract Society, c. 1830, http://www.biblebelievers.com/Bible_in_schools.html.

Another Founding Father who had strong beliefs about the Bible and education was Fisher Ames, a Congressman from Massachusetts in the First Session of the Congress when the Bill of Rights were formulated. In fact, Fisher Ames worked on the wording of the First Amendment to the Constitution. In sharing his beliefs concerning education he said:

> Should not the Bible regain the place it once held as a schoolbook? Its morals are pure, its examples are captivating and noble….The reverence for the sacred book that is thus early impressed lasts long; and, probably, if not impressed in infancy, never takes firm hold of the mind….In no Book is there so good English, so pure and so elegant, and by teaching all the same they will speak alike, and the Bible will justly remain the standard of language as well as of faith.[28]

On September 20, 1789, in an article published in *Palladium* magazine, Fisher Ames stated:

> We have a dangerous trend beginning to take place in our education. We're starting to put more and more textbooks into our schools….We've become accustomed of late of putting little books into the hands of children containing fables and moral lessons….We are spending less time in the classroom an the Bible, which should be the principle text in our schools….The Bible states these great moral lessons better than any other manmade book.

The Bible was very much a part of the heritageof colonial Americans and was the most common and most accessible printed text in America. The Bible was long used as a primary text in schools in the years prior to the American Revolution. It was a commonly held belief that all Americans should have a Bible available and that they be able to read it for themselves. The emphasis on personal Bible reading undergirded much of early American education. The average school child had a catechism or primer, a Psalter and a Testament or a Bible from which to learn reading and writing.

Referring to his own personal experience in the educational system, Noah Webster wrote that when he was young, the books used were primarily Dilworth's Spelling Books, the Psalter, Testament and Bible.

The New England Primer was the first textbook ever printed in America. Printed in 1690 in Boston, it was used for two hundred years in America's schools. In addition to teaching reading, writing and arithmetic, there was also a moral, biblical and spiritual dimension to its content. Here are some examples of how the alphabet was taught:
A – A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.
B – Better is little with fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith.
C – Come unto Christ ye that labor and are heavy laden and He will give you rest.
D – Do not the abominable thing which I hate saith the Lord.
E – Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.

[28] Fisher Ames. "School Books," *Palladium*, January 1801.

Notice that every phrase is a Bible verse. Children learned the Bible as they learned the alphabet. The following are some questions found in the back of the New England Primer: (Keep in mind this a first grade textbook.)

> "What's the fifth commandment?" "What's forbidden in the fifth commandment?" "What's required in the sixth commandment?" "What's forbidden in the sixth commandment?" "Who made iron to swim?" "What cities were destroyed be fire and brimstone?" "Who betrayed His Lord and Master?" "Who entered the promise land?" "Who was the most patient man?" "Who saves men?" "Who in Jesus Christ?"

Also in the back of this school textbook is what is entitled:
A short Prayer to be used every Morning.

> O Lord, our heavenly Father, almighty and everlasting God. I most humbly thank thee for thy great mercy and goodness in preserving and keeping me from all perils and dangers of this night past, and bringing me safely in the beginning of this day; defend me, O Lord, in the same, with thy mighty power; and grant, that this day I may fall into no sin, neither run into danger, but that all my doings may be ordered by thy governance, to do always that which is righteous in thy sight, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (The above appears in an 1805 edition of the New England Primer.)

America's Founding Fathers went through this kind of educational system. With this system of education John Quincy Adams received a Congressional diplomatic appointment overseas to the court of Catherine the Great in Russia as secretary to the Ambassador at the age of fourteen. Adams had a long and distinguished political career serving as a foreign ambassador, Secretary of State, U. S. Representative, U. S. Senator and as the nation's sixth President.

In a speech on July 4, 1837, John Quincy Adams asked his audience, "Why is it that, next to the birthday of the Savior of the World, your most joyous and most venerated festival returns on this day (on the Fourth of July)?"

In answer to his own question, Adams says,

> Is it not that, the chain of human events, the birthday of the nation is indissolubly linked with the birthday of the Savior? That it forms a leading event in the progress of the gospel dispensation? Is it not that the Declaration of Independence first organized the social compact on the foundation of the Redeemer's mission upon earth? That it laid the cornerstone of human government upon the first precepts of Christianity?[29]

He went on in his speech to develop the idea that the biggest victory of the American Revolution was that Christian principles and civil government would be tied together in

[29] John Quincy Adams. *An Oration Delivered Before the Inhabitants of the Town of Newburyport at their Request on the Sixty First Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1837*. Newburyport: Charles Whipple, 1837.

what he call an "indissoluble" bond. This is a very different perspective than many of our public officials adhere to in our contemporary times.

The first modern English Bible printed in America was the Noah Webster Bible of 1833. Noah Webster, the great statesman and linguist, is well known for his contributions in the educational arena. He produced many readers, spellers, textbooks and dictionaries. However, not many know that he produced the first modern English Bible in America. Webster thought the English language had changed so much since the King James Bible was printed in 1611 that there was a need for a more contemporary version. So he revised the King James Version into modern English. (At least it was modern in 1833.) The Noah Webster Bible was not a great success, by the world's standards, and Webster was deeply hurt by the public's indifference to what he considered "the most important enterprise of his life."

Other Noah Webster items in the Dunham Bible Museum include the first dictionary printed in English in America in 1806 and his famous 1828 dictionary, which was entitled *An American Dictionary of the English Language.* It is said that Noah Webster learned twenty-six languages in the process of this project so that he could understand and explain the development of the English language. The 1828 dictionary has a section in the introduction in which Webster explains the origin of language, beginning with Adam in Genesis chapter one of the Bible. His dictionaries, textbooks and other materials were filled with Scripture and biblical principles.

Webster played a major role in changing the American educational system. and promoted the idea of standardizing spelling. Webster introduced his own spellers in 1780. Joseph T. Buckingham articulated this change when he wrote "There was not, to my knowledge, any reading book proper, except the Bible, till Webster's Third Book, so called, came out."[30] Webster's speller, commonly referred to at the blue-back speller because of the color of the binding, dominated the market for over forty years.

With the increase in production of textbooks in the early 1800's, there was a decrease in the use of the Bible and religious materials. By the 1820s, the Bible had almost lost its central role as a text for teaching reading. The practice continued to some extent only in the rural areas. A major turning point in the reduction of the use of the Bible in schools was a 1827 law passed in Massachusetts prohibiting sectarian books in the classroom. Up until this time schools managed locally. After the 1827 law, a Board of Education was formed and there became more centralized control of the schools. Horace Mann became the president of the Board of Education and worked hard to enforce the textbook law. There was a revised version of the law passed in 1835, which banned a great deal of religious reading material from the school curricula in the name of keeping sectarianism out of the classrooms. What happened in Massachusetts became an example to other states and by the time of the Civil War, there was a definite lack of doctrinal materials in the schools.

[30] *American Bible*, 118.

While Horace Mann wanted to keep all religious doctrine out of the schools, he was firmly committed to keeping the Bible in the classroom. According to Paul Gutjahr, Mann believed "religion, just not sectarian religion, was absolutely necessary to any education that hoped to be useful in sustaining the republic, Mann argued that the Bible should be a daily part of every school's curriculum. Mann also believed that the Bible was actually a cure for sectarianism, and when read without doctrinal prejudice, its clear vision of Jesus and his moral teachings would inculcate the best virtues in students. He believed that the key to proper Bible use in the classroom was simply to make sure that the Bible was read in a way that allowed it to speak for itself without note or comment, so that its reading favored no particular religious tradition."[31]

It was Horace Mann along with other educational reformers who rallied for devotional Bible reading in the classroom to promote virtuous attitudes and behaviors. Eventually, Mann's struggle to keep classrooms nonsectarian lead to the Bible being banned from schools altogether, something he never intended to happen.

Noah Webster had a great concern for the moral and spiritual well being, as well as the education, of youth. The title of one of his 1794 textbooks describes Webster's lofty aims: "An American selection of lessons in reading and speaking, calculated to improve the minds and refine the taste of youth, and also to instruct them in the geography, history and politics of the United States."

Hieroglyphical Bibles were one of the many innovations in Bible production and marketing of the 1800s. The purpose of the Hieroglyphical Bibles was to teach the Bible to children through the use of ingenious illustrations. A number of them are on display in the Dunham Bible Museum.

Variety of Bible Publications

Bible production and marketing took on major changes during the Nineteenth Century. The Bible became available in a variety of sizes and shapes, and at least thirty-five new English translations appeared during this time period.

The Bible industry in America included not only the printing of Bibles, but also Bible dictionaries, study Bibles, Bible encyclopedias, commentaries and concordances. Cruden's *Concordance* of the Bible has had a world-wide circulation since it first appeared in England in 1737. The first American edition was published in Philadelphia in 1806. Alexander Cruden's life is a fascinating one. As a young man, he suffered bouts of insanity and was "occasionally confined to an asylum. He finally recovered, but was always very eccentric. He regarded himself as divinely appointed to censor the public, especially in such matters as swearing and Sabbath breaking. He styled himself 'Alexander the Corrector,' and went about London with a sponge which he used to erase obscene words in public places. He paid unwelcome attentions to several women of high station, thereby inviting trouble for himself, but with it all he was a kind-hearted and devoted Christian."[32]

[31] *American Bible*, 119-120.
[32] *Bible in America*, 133.

One of the most widely circulated early commentaries in America was the Scott's Family Bible. The first American edition was printed in 1804. The commentary was written by the Rev. Thomas Scott. Scott had no early educational advantages, but managed to educate himself. He was at first a rationalistic Unitarian, but he was converted to Calvinism by the celebrated John Newton, becoming a minister of the Church of England. Scott's Commentary on the whole Bible was published in London in 1788, and was the most popular of its time. More than 25,250 copies were published in America between 1808 and 1819. Sir James Stephen called Scott's work "the greatest theological performance of our age and country."[33]

According to some scholars, Scott's Bible Commentary was instrumental is shoring up Calvinist orthodoxy against the Unitarian threat in America. Thomas Scott's having come out of the rationalistic Unitarian belief system was no doubt helpful to him in addressing the relevant doctrinal issues of the time.

The twentieth century saw major advancements in the growth of the Christian movement and the production and distribution of Bibles around the world. Yet in America the Bible has, for many years, been in a drift from the center of the nation's print culture. There are many reasons that the Bible no longer has the preeminent place in America that it once enjoyed.

Paul Gutjahr identifies several factors in the Bible's changing role in America. The inroad of German Higher Criticism has been seen by some as a factor in eroding trust in the Bible. The explosive growth of the many editions and the very attempt to make the Bible more accessible may have contributed to making it less valued. The mass production and the wide verity of Bibles could have caused the Bible to appear more ordinary than extraordinary. Gutjahr sites the example of the Episcopal Bishop Arthur Cleveland Coxe, who led a crusade against the diversification of Bible editions before the Civil War arguing that too many editions of the Bible would erode faith in the Bible and its sacred and unique nature.

The tension between various church traditions and conflicts over which versions of the Bible should be used in the nation's public school and court systems ultimately led to the Bible's declining role in school curricula. Just the overwhelming amount of reading material available today seemingly is drowning out the Bible's message in our educational system and the marketplace of ideas.[34]

On a positive note, there are many signs of revival and spiritual awakening in America. There are encouraging signs of a renewed interest in Bible reading and an openness to the gospel. The more one is familiar with biblical and church history, the more hope one will have that God is still at work in the world today. The Word of God itself is the source of greatest hope and encouragement for America, the world and for all individuals who have placed their faith and trust in God and His word.

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[33] *Bible in America*, 132.
[34] *American Bible*, 176-178.

In relation to knowledge of the Bible, someone has said, "the main things are the plain things, and the plain things are the main things." It is really humanly impossible for any one person to know all there is about the Bible or to understand all that is in it. However, it is a great comfort to understand that God desires to communicate the most important truths of the Bible to everyone. He has made the primary truths of Scripture so clear that a child can understand and respond to its message.

The more one learns about the uniqueness, the history and the influence of the Bible, the greater his interest will be to know the content of the Bible. We should certainly guard against making the Bible an icon or an object of worship. It is important to recognize the real purpose for which God has given us His written Word -- to reveal His plan and purpose in the world and His redemptive activity throughout history. Speaking of the Scriptures, the Lord Jesus said, "they testify of me" (John 5:39). In other words, the Written Word points us to the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ.

More important than just having an intellectual knowledge of the written Word, is having an experiential knowledge and a spiritual relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ, the Living Word. In the Bible we can learn the way of salvation and eternal life through Christ.

The Dunham Bible Museum is a great treasure, not only from an educational, historical and literary standpoint, but also from a biblical and spiritual perspective. It is wonderful to know about our past, but it is better to know that we have a present relationship with the Living Christ of the Bible and that our future is secure in Him.

As available as the Bible is to the average American today, we are living in a time of biblical illiteracy. According to recent studies, most professing Christians have never read through the Bible even once. However, one can read through the entire Bible in one year by reading just fifteen minutes a day.

Anyone who desires to have a well-rounded education should make every effort to get to know the one book that claims to be the very Word of God. The Bible is the most important book, the greatest work of literature, the most accurate record of ancient history and the most profound book ever written.

God has promised to honor those who honor His Word. He will bless all those who commit to knowing and experiencing His Word and sharing it with others.

Appendix

In response to Robert Aitken's petition to print an entire Bible in English and receive support from Congress, the Congressional Committee issued this report dated September 12, 1782:

> The Committee to whom was referred a Memorial of Robert Aitken, Printer, dated 21st January, 1781, respecting an edition of the Holy

Scripture, report, That Mr. Aitken has, at a great expense, now finished an American edition of the Holy Scriptures in English; that the Committee have from time to time attended to his progress in the work; that they also recommended it to the two chaplains of Congress to examine and give their opinion of the execution, who have accordingly reported thereon; the recommendation and report being as follows:

PHILADELPHIA, 1st SEPTEMBER, 1782.

REVEREND GENTLEMEN:

Our knowledge of your piety and public spirit leads us without apology to recommend to your particular attention the edition of the Holy Scriptures publishing by Mr. Aitken. He undertook this expensive work at a time when, from the circumstances of the war, an English edition of the Bible could not be imported, nor any opinion formed how long the obstruction might continue. On this account particularly he deserves applause and encouragement. We therefore wish you, Reverend Gentleman, to examine the execution of the work, and if approved, to give it the sanction of your judgement, and the weight of you recommendation.

We are, with very great respect, you most obedient humble servants.

JAMES DUANE,

Chairman, in behalf of a Committee of Congress on Mr. Aitken's Memorial.

REVEREND DOCT. WHITE & REVD. MR. DUFFIELD,

Chaplains of the United States in Congress assembled.

(THE CHAPLAIN'S REPORT)

GENTLEMEN

Agreeably to your desire we have paid attention to Mr. Robert Aitken's impression of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. Having selected and examined a variety of passages throughout the work, we are of opinion that it is executed with great accuracy as to the sense and with as few grammatical and typographical errors as could be expected in an undertaking of such magnitude. Being ourselves witnesses of the demand for this invaluable book, we rejoice in the present prospect of a supply; hoping that it will prove as advantageous as it is honorable to the gentlemen who has exerted himself to furnish it at the evident risk of his private fortune. We are, Gentlemen, your very respectful and humble servants,

WILLIAM WHITE

GEORGE DUFFIELD

PHILADELPHIA, SEPTEMBER 10TH, 1782

Honorable JAMES DUANE, Esq., chairman, and other Honorable Gentlemen of the Committee of Congress on Mr. Aitken's Memorial.

The Congress responded favorably to the report of the Committee charged with examining the Memorial presented by Aitken. The following is the text of the

Congressional Resolution, which is printed by the publisher and bound into all copies of the Aitken Bible.

> WHEREUPON, RESOLVED,
> That the United States in congress assembled highly approve the peous and laudable undertaking of Mr. Aitken, as subservient to the interest of religion, as well as an instance of the progress of arts in this country, and being satisfied from the above report of his care and accuracy in the execution of the work, they recommend this edition of the Bible to the inhabitants of the United States, and hereby authorize him to publish this recommendation in the manner he shall think proper.
> CHA. THOMASON, Secy. [35]

The attesting signature is that of Charles Thomason, the Secretary to the Congress.

The following is a letter written by George Washington to Aitken's friend Dr. John Rodgers where he makes reference to Robert Aitken and the Bible:

> DEAR SIR –
> I accept with much pleasure your kind Congratulations on the happy Event of Peace, with the Establishment of our Liberties & Independence.
> Glorious indeed has been our Contest: - glorious, if we consider the prize for which we have contended, and glorious in its issue: - But in the midst of our Joys, I hope we shall not forget that, to Divine Providence is to be ascribed the Glory & the Praise.
> Your Proposition respecting Mr. Aitken's (sic) Bible would have been particularly noticed by me, had it been suggested in season. But the late Resolution of Congress for discharging Part of the Army, taking off near two thirds of our Numbers, it is now too late to make the Attempt. It would have pleased me well, if Congress had been pleased to make such an important present to the brave fellows, who have done so much for the Security of their Country's Rights & Establishment.
> I hope it will not be long before you will be able to go quietly to N. York – some Patience however will yet be necessary. But Patience is a noble Virtue, and when rightly exercised, does not fail of its reward.
> With much Regard & Esteem
> I am
> Dear Doctor
> Your most obed. Servant
> G. WASHINGTON[36]

[35] *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774*-1789. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1914. Volume 23, 572-574.
[36] Robert R. Dearden, Jr. and Douglas S. Watson. *An Original Leaf from the Bible of the Revolution and an essay concerning it*. San Francisco, CA: John Howell, 1930, 28.

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